

SPECIFICATION AMENDMENTS:

At line 3 of the Abstract page, please replace the title of the invention which now reads "PROCESS FOR PREPARING A SILICA/RUBBER BLEND" with the following rewritten title:

A PROCESS FOR PREPARING A SILICA/RUBBER BLEND WHICH INCLUDES DISPERSING SILICA, A SILICA COUPLING AGENT, AND A LOW MOLECULAR WEIGHT END-GROUP FUNCTIONALIZED DIENE RUBBER THROUGHOUT A CEMENT OF A CONVENTIONAL RUBBERY POLYMER, AND SUBSEQUENTLY RECOVERING THE SILICA/RUBBER BLEND FROM AN ORGANIC SOLVENT.

Please amend the Abstract as follows:

~~The present invention relates to a technique to efficiently and effectively disperse silica throughout a rubbery polymer. By utilizing this technique mechanical mixing procedures that are energy intensive and require large capital investments in mixing equipment can be significantly reduced. By reducing the amount of shearing forces to which the rubber is subjected polymer degradation is also significantly reduced. The utilization of the technique of this invention also results in a uniform blend of the silica throughout the rubber and consequently better interaction between the silica and the rubber. This results in better physical properties, such as higher modulus. The subject invention more specifically discloses~~ reveals ~~a process for preparing a silica/rubber blend which comprises dispersing silica, a silica coupling agent, and a low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber throughout a cement of a conventional rubbery polymer, and subsequently recovering the silica/rubber blend from the organic solvent. The present invention~~ It further reveals a tire having a tread that is made from such a silica/rubber blend, which is comprised of a generally toroidal shaped carcass with an outer circumferential tread, two spaced beads, at least one ply extending from bead to bead and sidewalls extending radially from and connecting said tread to said beads, wherein said tread is adapted to be ground contacting, and wherein said tread is comprised of the silica/rubber blend made by dispersing silica, a silica coupling agent, and a low molecular weight end-group

~~functionalized diene rubber throughout a cement of a conventional rubbery polymer, and subsequently recovering the silica/rubber blend from the organic solvent.~~

At line 1 of page 1, please replace the title of the invention which now reads "PROCESS FOR PREPARING A SILICA RUBBER BLEND" with the following rewritten title:

A PROCESS FOR PREPARING A SILICA/RUBBER BLEND WHICH INCLUDES DISPERSING SILICA, A SILICA COUPLING AGENT, AND A LOW MOLECULAR WEIGHT END-GROUP FUNCTIONALIZED DIENE RUBBER THROUGHOUT A CEMENT OF A CONVENTIONAL RUBBERY POLYMER, AND SUBSEQUENTLY RECOVERING THE SILICA/RUBBER BLEND FROM AN ORGANIC SOLVENT.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 1, line 1 to line 27, as follows:

United States Patent ~~5,227,425~~ 5,227,425 discloses a sulfur-vulcanizable rubber composition obtained by thermomechanical work of a conjugated diene compound and an aromatic vinyl compound prepared by solution polymerization in a hydrocarbon solvent having a total content of aromatic vinyl compound of between 5% and 50% and a glass transition temperature (T_g) of between 0° and -80°C with 30 to 150 parts by weight per 100 parts by weight of elastomer of a silica having a BET surface area of between 100 and $250\text{ m}^2/\text{g}$, a CTAB surface area of between 100 and $250\text{ m}^2/\text{g}$, an oil absorption measured in DBP of between 150 and 250 ml/100 g, and an average projected area of the aggregates greater than 8500 nm^2 before use and between 7000 and 8400 nm^2 after thermomechanical mixing as well as the additives conventionally employed, with the exception of the sulfur vulcanization system, comprising at least one heat step reaching a temperature of between 130°C and 180°C for a suitable period of time of between 10 seconds and 20 minutes which is a function of the temperature selected in order to carry out the mechanical work and of the nature and volume of the components subjected to the mechanical work, followed by a finishing step consisting of the incorporating of the vulcanization system by mechanical work at a temperature below the vulcanization temperature.

Please amend the paragraph appearing at page 6, line 28 to page 7, line 4, as follows:

In the first step of the process of this invention, a silica, a silica coupling agent, and a low molecular weight end-group functionalized diene rubber are dispersed throughout the cement of the conventional rubbery polymer. This is typically done by making a slurry of the silica in an organic solvent and subsequently adding the low molecular weight end group functionalized polydiene rubber ~~to thereto~~ thereto followed by the addition of silica coupling agent to the slurry. The slurry containing the silica, the low molecular weight end group functionalized diene rubber, and the silica coupling agent is then added to the cement of the conventional rubbery polymer and the resulting solution is mixing. Normally, agitation will be provided to mix the various components together to attain an essentially homogeneous solution.